

Living and Learning Democracy in Schools

Democratic School Development

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The German BLK program “Learning and Living Democracy”, often described as “democratic education” is the basis of the material in this handbook. It is based on ten years experience in German Schools by Dorothea Schuetze and Marcus Hildebrandt. The concepts have been tested and put into practice with remarkable success in x schools over the past y years. With increasing frequency these innovative educators have been asked to assist as external facilitators with long term school development programs in mainstream schools. A Training Institute has been established in Berlin to train facilitators to do this work which is more and more in demand in mainstream schools.

The widespread scepticism they faced in the beginning gradually gave way to appreciation as parents, teachers, pupils and support staff experienced the benefits of the school development and problem solving processes. An essential principle of the approach described is that all the people involved participate, and are seen, respected, and taken seriously as experts in their own needs and wishes. This includes, teachers, students, parents, other school personnel and sometimes external partners.

Contrary to initial fears and doubts that the process would be too time-consuming and unproductive, participation came to be seen as a huge benefit when dealing with school related topics, common decision making and problem solving.

The use of external facilitators, which was also initially viewed with scepticism, came to be accepted as participants realized the benefits of impartial leadership.

External facilitation ensured that all people involved participated equally, that differences were fully expressed, and that the interests and needs of everyone were heard and considered. When people within the system guide the process, it is more difficult for facilitators to maintain an impartial attitude, though in some situations it may be possible.

After several years of testing, evaluation and further development, these ideas are now being offered to a wider audience and a Training Institute for facilitators has been established in Berlin.

This handbook is offered in the hope that schools world-wide will benefit from the democratic school development processes described, and embrace these ideas for the benefit of all.

The handbook is of interest to potential facilitators and well as to whole school communities: parents, teachers, pupils and support staff, and in some cases, other community organizations.

Advice for potential facilitators.

Impartial facilitation does not mean that the facilitators should have nothing to do with school. On the contrary, it is essential that they have detailed knowledge of the particular school and the school system generally. The required knowledge should be gained prior the commencement of the school development process. Observing experienced facilitators at work can assist greatly.

Teachers, educators, social workers, parents, former students, mediators, and consultants can all potentially become facilitators. It is recommended that they work only with a school in which they are not directly involved to avoid a confusion of roles and a conflict of interests.

It is helpful for facilitators to have themselves experienced a democratic school development process, and if this is not possible, to understand the process by studying this handbook in depth

What to expect from the handbook:

Readers will be familiarized with the central principles of democratic school development, the abilities required, and the methods which have been successfully used.

The question of whether it is realistic for young children to participate, with equal rights, in a democratic school development processes is addressed.

The procedures and implementation of the method are described in chapter x. Giving detailed practical examples, the authors explain the dynamics of the negotiation process between teachers, parents and students. They then discuss the implications of continuing the development process long term in any particular school.

In chapter the authors offer advice regarding the roles and competences required of facilitators in a democratic school development process. The need to attend to the school's particular framework, resources and structures, is addressed.

Chapter.....addresses the factors which can enhance or hinder the school development process.

In chapter x Educational theorist Gabi Elverich presents the results of her evaluation study. She has interviewed the participants of three school development programs of this type, both at the beginning of the process and towards the end. The insights from her qualitative research include further information regarding the factors contributing to success, the challenges, and the permanency of results.

A helpful CD rom describing the school development process, including exercises and games, is available in German. It is recommended that German speakers read the handbook (available in German and English) before using the CD rom For information on training possibilities contact: info@schulcoaching.com.

Acknowledgements...

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They trust that the school development programs they have facilitated will have lasting life-enhancing effect for all in the schools in which they have worked. They applaud the patience and courage of participants and share their enjoyment of all the successes, large and small.

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Description of the approach

Brief overview

In order to develop and design schools in a democratic way it is necessary that all the different interest groups within the school participate. This includes teachers, students, parents, counsellors, educators, social workers, and also technical staff and external partners (e.g. government authorities, management staff, etc.) It is important that each party involved knows the needs and wishes of the others and experience them as relevant. Thus all the relevant groups embark on a journey together to evolve their school in order to transform it into a more life-enhancing place of learning and working.

The foundation for this process involves identifying the strengths, the positive qualities of the school, and the wishes of all the people involved in regard to school organisation, the curriculum, and the way people interact with each other.

Dialogue amongst all people involved reveals the common ground, positive feedback is encouraged, and a supportive culture of appreciation develops. Perspectives, needs, and demands of the participating sub-groups can vary considerably, and can lead to conflicts or misunderstandings. A central pillar of this model is negotiation: Consensus-oriented negotiation is the core of everyday democratic functioning and is basic to the model.

It must be restated that participants sometimes begin with reluctance, scepticism and resistance, believing that the process is likely to be cumbersome, ineffective and a waste of precious time. It is only after experiencing the process that they begin to appreciate the enormous value of a truly democratic process.

“Learning and Living Democracy” in action

The school development model described here was first tested in a modern secondary school in Berlin, Germany during 2002 and 2003. Some of the school's teenagers were exhibiting racist, right-wing extremist behaviour. When imposing bans proved unsuccessful, a democratic school development process was trialled. Active participation of the teenagers themselves was successful and democratic values and behaviours were learned by the whole school community.

Ref. Edelstein/Fauser 2001; Schuetze 2003

Because of its success, the process was then used in three other BLK schools in 2003: a primary school with many migrant students, and two high schools. These schools continue to engage in the processes described in this handbook. Parts of the school development model have also been used in many other schools, in one case in the development of “school rules” and in various human rights projects. Over several years, the approach has been tested, refined and adapted with the fundamental principles remaining constant.

Central principles of democratic school development

The school development approach consists of five basic components:

quality development, resource orientation, democracy development, achievement of objectives, and development of competences. Democratic school development can only be achieved in a sustainable and lasting way if all five factors are integrated successfully. It is essential that existing resources and strengths of the school are recognized and honoured. The way decisions are made plays a central role in the process. To achieve good democratic decision making, some competences are required which have to be learned or enhanced. (See chapter x)

Let everyone participate!

The “school system” presents big challenges for democratic development, because of the existing hierarchical power structures, and because of the diverse interests of the different people involved. Therefore, it is desirable that everyone, teachers, students, families, social workers, technical, administrative and other support staff, and possibly external partners, are all part of the process and that individual perspectives and requirements are taken seriously and considered equally during the process of negotiation.

Change can evoke fear and resistance in many people. If these people are not co-creators of the change, it is likely that they will not support the new developments, and in some cases, might hinder or sabotage them. If all involved do not participate, the solutions can never be optimal as not all perspectives contribute to their creation. Important views needs and competencies are missed, to the detriment of the whole process. For example, parents or students have been found to contribute completely new insights, creative ideas and suggestions that the teaching staff would never have thought of. These become part of the solution which benefits everyone.

Create benefits for everybody.

It is not the quality of the school development process alone that matters. Generally, people are only willing to participate in a process of change if they can see immediate benefits for themselves. Therefore, each stage of the

school's development should involve perceivable benefits in the near future. These benefits might be things such as increased cooperation, improved learning, improved the planning of classes and activities, better timetabling, more efficient use of facilities, etc.

Support of all participants.

The events held at the beginning of the school development process, during which the existing strengths of the school and the wishes of all participants are identified, are central to the whole process. These initial events generate intensive discussion and reflection between and within the different subgroups involved. It is crucial that each person knows that their contribution is important and will impact on the resulting school development.

Every school does have its strengths and these have been built up over many years. The acknowledgement of these strengths and appreciation of the work that has been accomplished is very important. This validation builds up the confidence of those who contributed. It is not uncommon that in schools there is a lack of expressed appreciation. In many schools the focus is often on difficulties, deficits and defects rather than strengths. This incomplete and therefore inaccurate perception may be reinforced within the school, and sometimes comes from outside as well, for example from media, school authorities and politicians. The establishment of a "culture of appreciation" within and between all subgroups is a crucially important part of the work, and impacts on everyone's well-being.

In addition to the development of a culture of appreciation, promotion of dialogue between the different subgroups by means of specific activities is important. When participants see that their ideas are discussed by others and are taken seriously, increased confidence and self-respect result.

Democratic development is a learning process for everybody

Learning democratic functioning is not a process that is transmitted from teacher to student, but rather a *process* in which all participants (adults as well as children and teenagers) learn and grow. Self-reflection and the questioning of existing power structures are encouraged. Democratic functioning and decision making are learned and practised, and their value experienced first hand. People who have previously learned and embraced democratic ways of functioning are in a good position to model these behaviours to others. (ref. Edelstein/Fauser 2001)

Expanding the understanding of democracy

"Democracy" is taught in social science and history classes, mostly in a theoretical way and in connection to governmental systems. The few practical experiences people have with democracy in school are often limited to the way school committees and other such groups function. These experiences present only a small part of the possible dimensions of democracy.

Democracy as a form of living

The participation in a democratic school development process offers the chance to experience a broader dimension of democracy, and to use school as a place to learn and live democracy. It becomes clear that democracy can be much more than a tick in the box at elections. Democracy can be a form of social interaction where everybody is respected and taken seriously with his or her different interests and needs. Democratic behaviours can be learned, practised and extended further in the school setting. Practical everyday examples include how students deal with each other in class, how conflicts are resolved, how decisions are made, and how the concerns wishes and visions of students, teachers, parents and all other people involved are included. Democratic exercises and experiences can be designed to demonstrate that win-win-solutions are possible for all parties involved and are worth the effort.

Democracy in the wider society.

The experiencing of democracy at school has effect well beyond the school context. Participants gain a new awareness of what constitutes real democracy, and can then take responsibility in the creation of a new democratic paradigm in many other situations in society.

Gaining awareness of discriminatory power structures.

Gaining awareness of discriminatory power structures is one of the most important aspects of democratic school development. It is also one of the biggest challenges. The aim is to develop a democratic culture, sensitising all participants to undemocratic, discriminating, racist or contemptuous attitudes and unjust behaviours, and enabling them to take a stand and to develop new ways of dealing with a situation.

Traditionally, school is a system based on hierarchical structures and imbalances of power. All individuals living, learning and working in this system are affected by these structures. The way things operate are so natural, normal and

influential that they are rarely questioned. Actively learning, practising and evolving democratic ways of functioning is not always an easy task. In the first instance it is necessary to become aware of one's own involvement in existing discriminating power structures, and to reflect on their consequences. The most obvious power positions within school are the teachers' position in relation to the students and adults' position generally in relation to children and teenagers. To question these power positions can create insecurity and fear of unproductive chaos. It can sometimes be very hurtful. Thus strong resistance may be encountered.

Obvious and hidden forms of discrimination in school (and in society generally) need to be considered. Discriminating remarks and behaviour often go unchallenged. In a democratic school system they must be acknowledged and addressed. To achieve this it is necessary to ensure that all school participants have access to relevant information and get the opportunity to participate. For example, foreign parents who do not speak the local language, would need to have material translated and have translators available in group sessions. In Germany this would apply to the many Turkish immigrants. In the New Zealand context, opportunities to deepen understanding of race relations between Maori, Pacific and Pakeha communities may be particularly relevant.

Training activities and projects can be offered to assist in the raising of awareness about the school environment and any discriminating structures that exist within it. In the field of anti-discrimination there are multiple training possibilities that can be applied in schools, preferably with the support of external facilitators, as this topic is not an easy one. No matter which way a school chooses to go, if it claims to be democratic and takes its educational task seriously non-discriminating structures and behaviour must be developed and permanently cultivated.

Awareness of roles in the school system

Without awareness of the different roles and power structures within a school system, democratic school development is not possible. It is important for participants to reach agreement on what roles, relationships and power structures exist in the system, and this ideally should happen at the beginning of the school development process. It may be helpful to create "guidelines for a democratic school culture", and review these from time to time.

It is not essential that all existing structures and responsibilities are brought into question. Teachers have to fulfil their educational tasks, and they have to do this within a framework set by the Ministry of Education and school authorities. It is adults who must ultimately take responsibility for decisions and actions. Nevertheless changes can occur. One example is dealing differently with assessments. Students, for instance, can learn to measure and assess their own progress by setting their own achievement goals and applying methods of self-assessment. Afterwards teachers and students can enter into a dialogue over their assessments, and together formulate achievement goals. This means that the teacher can be a partner, companion and advisor in the assessment process. The assessment criteria of the teacher becomes transparent to the students, and are discussed and negotiated with them. There are also opportunities to develop and use feedback systems which provide the teachers with feedback about their own functioning from their students.

Some other examples: Children and young adults can have an influence on the decision making process in regards to the content and the teaching methods. They can bring themselves in as experts on certain topics or skills in class. Students can practise democratic principles in student-led committees. Regular time can be allocated in class for democratic processes to be experienced through games and exercises. These are just a few of the many ways democratic functioning can be practised in schools.

The roles of parents in relation to school also can change dramatically. Rather than the common separation between school and home, parents and teaching staff can become partners supporting each other, exchanging information perspectives and concerns.

These are not new ideas. They are the norm in some schools, and while they offer big challenges for participants, the benefits are invaluable. Once participants experience the benefits their willingness and level of engagement increases many-fold. It should be noted that not every approach is transferable to every school. Each school has its own specific conditions and prerequisites and therefore has to find its own appropriate ways by means of negotiation with all participants.

The principle of consensus in negotiation processes

A central principle of democratic school development is the principle of consensus in negotiation processes. Majority votes are only used in exceptional cases. (Majority voting was used only once in all the years of the application of this school development approach by the authors). Majority voting may result in a situation where almost half the participants are not happy and may not support, or may even sabotage the decided course of action, causing very

inefficient use of time and resources. A decision which all the participants can support is much more likely to result in successful outcomes.

With consensus decision-making, reservations that people hold are taken seriously. At the same time the people who are unsure or against a decision are called to account to clearly define their doubts and make alternative suggestions. It is not enough to simply be against something. Sometimes only minor changes are enough to bring about consensus agreement. (eg, wording, dates, deadlines).

Expressed reservations or suggestions for a change often mean that matters previously not yet thought of are given consideration. Thus reservations and doubts are important for quality decisions to be made. If decisions are made by a majority vote, important aspects may not be discussed and outvoted people may block progress.

In a truly democratic system, the goal is that all participants are heard equally and there are no “losers”. This means that decisions are 'owned' by the participants enabling the highest level of support.

Picture: “pumpkin” exercise – topic: consensus decision-making

Resources, target groups, problems and processes

Democratic school development attempts to take into account all existing resources, target groups, problems and processes. This means there is no standardized set of methods. Each intervention, each workshop, each event is designed by the facilitators for the particular situation. Different ideas and methods are mixed and adapted to maximize exchange of information, creativity and fair negotiation to achieve the defined goals.

The facilitation of this process is based on the idea that the participants themselves are the experts, and that the facilitator acts as a kind of midwife, providing a safe environment by giving structure, methodology and an appropriate framework so that the existing resources and competences of the participants can be utilized to maximum effect. When choosing different methods, the target groups' ages and backgrounds are taken into account. The discussions are designed in a way that allows everyone to participate. With small children for instance, it is recommended to use painting, clay modelling, role plays etc for the children's views to be expressed. When different age-groups are involved, several working groups may need to be formed, dealing with the same questions, but using different methods. Afterwards, the results of each group are brought together.

Clearly, facilitators require experience of group dynamics with groups of different ages and backgrounds, a high degree of creativity and a broad repertoire of methods.

Beginning the process: Exploring strengths and wishes.

At the beginning of a democratic school development process, a workshop is held where participants express their views about the strengths of the school as they perceive them. They then formulate wishes in relation to each individual sub-group in the school community (including their own). This includes commenting on structural aspects, on the quality of the teaching in the classroom and school administration.

The 'strengths and wishes' approach differs from a commonly used one which focuses on strengths and weaknesses. People are used to focusing on irregularities, deficits and difficulties. Such a discussion may have a place in the school development process. However the approach suggested here deliberately focuses on strengths and wishes. A collection of weaknesses can easily have a demotivating and paralysing effect whereas the identification of strengths and wishes supports self-confidence and a culture of appreciation. The deficits perceived by the participants are indirectly expressed when their wishes are explored. In comparison to a list of weaknesses, the formulation of wishes is forward-looking and constructive. This approach follows methods of modern organizational development.

The 'strengths and wishes' approach can also help to formulate a school profile and its corresponding developmental goals.

The relevance of strengths

In order to achieve school development goals, it is essential to identify existing strengths. These strengths, when acknowledged and valued become building blocks for the developmental process. The different perspectives of all participants in the school are gathered to clarify how each stakeholder group and each individual perceive the school, what they like, what is important for them, what they want to maintain or cultivate. The different perspectives and views when put together, result in a diverse and often impressive picture which provides everybody with an overview of the degree to which existing structures and activities are valued and acknowledged. From this, the school can gain strength and energy to take the next steps.

Through the gathering of the school's strengths the participants not only come to know each other and the prevailing views better, they also learn about the common ground they share with others, and the differences and imbalances. Thus they can reflect on the possible reasons for commonalities and differences.

Some examples of questions raised during a strengths and wishes workshop:

- how come all stakeholder groups agree that “school and toilets are nice and clean”, except the cleaner whose wish is that “boys should pee in the urinal and not everywhere else”.
- why is it that all groups apart from the parents consider that the school has “good school atmosphere”.
- Why does the cleaning staff not mention the students in regards to 'polite manners'.
- How come students rank “natural science” and “vocational guidance” under strengths, but do not mention other subjects such as maths, languages or history on their strengths list.
- why do only the teachers name the “good learning atmosphere” as a strength, and all the other groups don't?
- how come students and parents but nobody on the teaching staff see field trips as central strength.

These questions are excellent starting points in coming to understand what is occurring in the school.

Rationalization of activities and increased enjoyment

Often, participants especially teachers fear that every change will require more of their energy and time. Teachers and other members of the school community are often already overburdened, making more engagement is virtually impossible. Therefore, as well as an increase in quality, each school development process should lead to a rationalization of activities. By surveying the requirements of the different stakeholder groups the school can find out which activities and initiatives the participants like and want to maintain. Time and energy consuming activities which are not valued by the participants could sometimes be given up and the freed energy could be used for the further development of acknowledged strengths. When implemented well, a school development program leads to increased enjoyment and a decreased sense of being burdened for teachers and all other participants.

The relevance of wishes

When considering the surveyed wishes, all participants learn what others consider to be a “good school”. The wish lists also reveal a lot about existing conflicts and differences which might already be visible, but most often are hidden and unspoken. Hidden conflicts lead to latent tensions and dissatisfaction and generally have negative effects on the school atmosphere. The wishes provide precious information about areas in which all groups see a need for development and change. Thus, the collection of wishes is the engine which drives school development.

Strengths as the energy source and wishes as the engine for school development.

Strengths and wishes are not considered separately within the developmental process. After the school has decided to cultivate a few central strengths, the expressed wishes are consulted to *extend the chosen strengths*. This means that those wishes which can enhance already acknowledged strengths have priority in the way forward.

Often, the focus on strengths and wishes is considered sceptically. It might be thought that in case of a teaching deficit, chances for improvement would be small if the focus lies primarily on the development of the strengths. However, this is refuted in practice. When asking for wishes, facilitators explicitly ask for wishes in relation to quality of teaching. Most often, wishes in this area turn out to be central wishes. The most important wishes are assigned to the corresponding strengths of the school. Measures are then formulated to fulfil these wishes and, at the same time, to cultivate or to extend the chosen strengths. This means that the wishes are the basis of any future development. The strengths determine in which *area* the realization of the wishes is tackled.

An example: let's suppose that priority wish is to increase the use of computers in class. This wish may common in many schools. However, all schools are different. One school might have “sprinter classes” (school leaving certificate in a shorter time period) on their list of strengths, another school's strength might be a “school with courage and without racism”. Accordingly, focussing on strengths, the possible effects of the above mentioned wish on the teaching in class are different:

- In the school with sprinter classes the increased use of computers could provide self-learning opportunities so that the students become familiar with the abundance of learning materials available to them.
- In the school “with courage and without racism” computers could be used to explore websites dealing with racism, and work with material developed by anti-racist organisations for use in schools.

A culture of cooperation.

A culture of cooperation in a school plays a central role in changing ways of teaching. If there is lack of cooperation

among the teachers or between the teaching staff and the students, it is not easy to introduce new learning methods based on participation and learning partnerships. However, if the democratic school development process has a positive influence on the cooperation of all participants, this can open up new perspectives for changing the way teaching occurs. Schools which give importance to values, cooperation and ritual, prove to be very successful when restructuring their existing teaching methods.

Promotion of democratic competences in school.

Since 1996 international organisations have increasingly supported these ideas within the field of international educational policy, among them OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). The OECD looks at economic development in relation to various aspects of quality of life, and especially in relation to educational and social outcomes of learning. In 2005, it formulated the so called “key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society” (Ref: OECD 2005, Quality and competencies guidelines page 10)

where are the references listed ??

Some of these competencies summarized are as follow:

<p>Specialist competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to build up knowledge and experience of democratic functioning. • to detect and assess problems in democratic functioning.
<p>Methodical competence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act systematically and bring projects to fruition. • to effectively reach the public
<p>Self competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be aware of and develop own interests, opinions and goals • clearly communicate own interests in democratic decision making processes • be self-motivated, show initiative and use opportunities for participation • understand and communicate own values, convictions and actions in a broader context
<p>Social competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand and accept the perspective of others • negotiate norms, ideas and goals in a democratic and cooperative way • deal with diversity and differences constructively and solve conflicts in a fair way • show empathy, solidarity and responsibility towards others

Summarized from: Guidelines “democratic education for secondary schools”, draft of the expert group “quality & competences”/BLK program “learning and living democracy”, p. 11, Berlin 2006.

Within a democratic school development program, the promotion of the competences listed above cannot be accomplished to the same degree for all participants. Differences are especially observed between those who participate regularly in the negotiation rounds, where intensive experiences of democratic processes are gained, and those who are only partially involved. How far democratic competencies can be developed during any one program will depend in part on the extent to which the 'prerequisites for the success of a democratic school development' are in place. (see “Conditions and factors for success “page ?).

Nevertheless, the listed competencies are important and are promoted as far as is possible.

Additional considerations not mentioned explicitly in the table above are as follows:

- learning for all participants should occur (children/teenagers and adults)
- participants come to see different perspectives and opinions as opportunities rather than problems.
- a “culture of acknowledgement and appreciation develops
- awareness is heightened of power imbalances and discriminating structures at school and in society generally
- participants build up confidence in their abilities to be effective.
- Participants increase their understanding and appreciation of consensus decision-making processes and the ineffectiveness of a winner-loser mentality.

- Participants come to value 'participative management' in school administration

Learning democratic competences

In order to facilitate the learning of democratic competences, specific methods are applied in the school development events and workshops.

The task is to create stimulating experiences where the whole school atmosphere becomes more relaxed, participants get to know each other in new ways, improve communication, become aware of group dynamics and learn the theory of democratic functioning and its practical applications in a playful way.

Sometimes the work can be intense and challenging. The aim, always, is to stimulate the imagination, creativity, strengths and abilities of the participants. The methods include group dynamics exercises, role plays, communication games, 'get to know each other' games, warm-up games, reunion games, cooperation games, group division games, reflection games, and so on. (An appendix has been compiled describing some of these games and ideas).

The methods used assist in the development of a range of abilities and enhance communication and cooperation within the school. Some activities are specifically designed to teach awareness of democratic functioning. In particular the highly stimulating and innovative "Betzavta" exercises increase awareness of how we habitually behave, and increase our awareness of what true democratic functioning is. (See "process procedure" chapter and Schuetze/Sischka 2003).

In addition participants learn, in small groups, to present their concerns, to speak in front of larger groups, to argue, to debate, and to listen to and appreciate other. Consensus oriented negotiation is learned, where each person participates with equal rights. A repertoire of discussion, feedback and analysis methods, is employed.

Picture: Playful negotiation round

Development of democratic functioning in children and teenagers.

Adults are often surprised at the abilities displayed by children and teenagers participating in the activities described above. Students commonly develop ideas and suggestions with each other and then present them to the adult group. By standing up in front of adults and explaining their ideas, they reveal abilities not previously perceived or encouraged. When their ideas are taken seriously, the young people grow in confidence and ability to contribute in a valuable way. These experiences have a lasting effect on the personality and future development of the young participants. Above all, they develop trust in the democratic process.

An example from a participating primary school in Germany:

During the negotiation rounds students who were perceived by the teachers as "unable to concentrate" had the chance to experience new and playful ways to participate. The issue of homework arose. The wishes expressed by the children were "less homework", "no homework" or "voluntary homework". The children created paintings, wrote their suggestions on posters, and presented their ideas in the form of a short theatre piece. The negotiations with the adults that followed had the result that there was some obligatory homework, (multiplication tables and spelling as these were especially important to the teachers), and in addition, a choice from a list of voluntary homework. It was decided that one day per week there would be no homework at all. This arrangement was introduced in the whole school. The unexpected result was that the children now do more homework than before the implementation of the new rules. The fact that the children were democratically involved in the decision-making enabled them to feel good about the decisions reached, rather than experience them as rules imposed from above.

Picture: presentation by children after a negotiation event

Children were experienced in a new way by some of the adults. Abilities were displayed and developed which previously had not had space for expression in the everyday life of school and home. The children experienced their voices being respected, and felt proud of the result they achieved.

Working democratically with small children

How are truly democratic processes possible with small children? Often adults doubt that this is possible and we hear statements and questions such as: “Don’t you need certain boundaries and rules to protect the children?”, “Aren’t they too small and inexperienced to take responsibility for certain things?”, “If we let the children decide for themselves they will play all day and learn nothing at school.”

Negotiation with children having equal rights does not mean that they will be left unprotected from possible dangers, or will be left to make decisions by themselves. The opposite is the case. It is fundamental to perceive the needs and interests of the children and take them seriously, and in particular to take seriously their desire to play. It is well known that everyone can learn through play, and children often request more opportunities to do this. Just as the adults listen to and respect the perspectives and motives of the children, so too do the children learn to do the same for adults.

Children often experience rules and prohibitions as limiting and arbitrary and consequently feel powerless, at the mercy of the adults and “the school system”. Adults frequently do not explain to children why they should or should not do certain things. If the children are included in discussions about what is important or worrying to the adults and why, and at the same time have their own needs acknowledged, they are usually very capable of understanding and accepting the adult’s perspective. They are “initiated” in the true sense of the word, into the very core of the situation or problem, and learn how to weigh up different perspectives. Transparency is necessary for anyone to assess a situation and to make sensible responses.

During the many school development programs experienced by the authors, especially in primary schools, students want more play time. The teachers are often opposed to more play and insist on “regular lessons”. This provides the opportunity to examine the needs behind the opposing wishes. In the brainstorming of ideas during the negotiation round that follows, different needs and wishes are integrated so that, if possible, all participants are satisfied with the solution. This is not necessarily easy to achieve, but is almost always possible. For example in some cases it was achieved by including more games and playful teaching methods into the lessons.

A common experience in democratic functioning is that an outcome that previously seemed impossible becomes possible. It is often assumed that to cater to the needs of two groups in apparent conflict with each other, compromise is necessary. However compromise usually means that neither group really gets what they want. Again and again, in truly democratic processes, it is discovered that both groups can get what they wish for or need, without any compromise. This may be hard to believe. It is only through the experiencing of successful democratic negotiations that trust in true democracy develops. (Describe pumpkin game?)

Stages of a School Development Program

Stage 1. Beginning

To begin a school development process, the agreement of as many people as possible who will be affected by future changes should be sought. In particular, initially, the teachers are made aware of the possible effects the process might have on the school. It must be emphasized again and again that school development is not a project with a pre-determined end, but a long term process which ideally evolves continuously and is supported by all participants. If the teaching staff agree to embark on this journey, the next step is to consult with the parents, board of trustees, students representatives, and others involved in the school community.

Stage 2. Information sharing and reflection

During this stage, gatherings with all participants are held where the concept is explained by the facilitators in more detail. Individual stakeholder groups express their different ideas about “democracy in school”, and consider the extent to which they are willing to give the proposed development process a chance. It is important to clarify how much support there is for the program and be receptive to the reservations. For example, teachers often fear that the process will require too much of their time and energy. Another common fear is that students will take over and make all the decisions. Students, on the other hand, are often sceptical about whether the teachers are genuinely willing to give them an equal voice in decision making. Existing fears and doubts have to be taken very seriously. They must never be ignored or dismissed. Participants must be assured that if their doubts and fears were to come about, the facilitators would deal with them explicitly and intervene if necessary.

Introductory events with students, usually about 45 minutes long, are held in each class. All parents are invited to come to evening events, usually in separate groups for each age group. Additional events are held with teachers, social workers, administrative staff, cleaners, and external partners, (what is an example of an external; partner??) Some consultations happen in personal meetings and conversations.

Picture: information and reflection event in class

Stage 3. Strengths-and-wishes-workshops

The next stage is to collect and analyse the strengths and wishes of all stakeholders. When working with students, it helpful to use different approaches to address different age groups. The following scheme has proved itself in past programs:

- school beginners: painting and story telling during a project day
- Year 3 and 4: painting, writing and role plays during a project day
- Year 5 – 13: writing strengths and wishes on cards, as well as discussions during a double period.

The strengths and wishes of teachers can be best explored during a study day. Areas such as conflict resolution, decision making processes, teaching approaches, and other school issues and problems and emerge during these events if sufficient time is allowed.

The exploration with parents typically takes place in an evening or weekend event. All parents of the school are invited, with with a choice of either a Friday evening or Saturday morning, often in separate groups depending on the ages of their children. (In one case in Germany, these events were held in two languages Turkish and German.)

At the conclusion of the strengths-and-wishes analysis, the most commonly expressed strengths and wishes are identified for each stakeholder group (see: practical modular system, chapter 03 “inventory”).

Stage 4. The negotiation rounds.

At the end of each strengths-and-wishes-workshop the participants are asked whether they are interested in participating in a negotiation round. Up to 30 people can participate in each negotiation round. They are made up of the following groups:

- 6-10 teachers, and (if needed) other educators.
- 6 -10 parents,
- 10 -16 children and teenagers.
- 1-2 school administrators.
- 1-3 participants of other stakeholder group.

It is recommended that the first three groups listed are of approximately equal size, though often more children or teenagers are invited to ensure that they are not in the minority compared to the number of adults. Aside from this consideration, it does not matter which group is in the majority, as long as all participants are satisfied with the process that takes place. If at all possible, all stakeholder groups should be represented. In principle, everyone who wants to participate should be allowed to do so and no-one should be coerced to do so.

As the process progresses, it is not always the same people who represent each group. By including new representatives, the circle of actively engaged people within the school grows. It is important that people participating in the negotiation rounds keep in close contact with committees that form and maintain functional communication with them, to ensure the necessary flow of information about decisions, the decision-making process, problem-solving, conflict resolution, strategies etc.

Selection of participants for negotiation rounds.

In the experience of the authors, adults volunteer readily to participate in democratic school development programs, despite the time commitment involved, and students are usually so keen that a selection process is needed to choose representatives. (The negotiation rounds occur at four to six week intervals, take place during the late afternoon and evenings, are each 2 to 3 hours long.)

To choose student representatives, students compile criteria for participation. For example, all age groups must be represented, equal numbers of girls and boys are chosen and helpful competences are considered. Students choose their own representatives.

Sometimes a support group is set up which exchanges information with the selected students of the negotiation round. This group helps in making suggestions and decisions, organizes supportive activities, and may also participate in the negotiation rounds, alternating with the selected students.

Because the student population changes during the program, the composition of the negotiation round is always changing. This is also applies to other stakeholder groups and schools advertise for new members of the negotiation round as needed.

Analysis of the 'strengths and wishes' results of and selection of a central strength

Ideally, the participants of the negotiation round gather at a weekend event, at an independent venue outside of their usual living and school environments. A neutral place allows the participants to get to know each other in a new way, providing an important basis for all further meetings. At the beginning of the negotiation process the results of the strengths-and-wishes-analysis are considered, and the participants work to come to a common understanding of the strengths. In the course of this process, they record the commonalities of the different perspectives, and discuss the differences. For example: In one school, both parent and student groups mentioned “field trips” as a central strength. However teachers did not regard field trips as a strength of the school. The goal of the discussion was to find the reasons for this difference. It became clear that the teachers definitely acknowledged the field trips as a positive activity, but they experienced the unpaid work involved as a burden and therefore did not perceive these trips as a strength.

The negotiation round provides the opportunity to hear and understand different points of view. All groups enter into conversations with each other and this is often a new experience which breaks down existing reservations and prejudices towards other stakeholder groups. First ideas for new developments start to arise. For example, in the above case of “field trips”, some parents spontaneously volunteered to support the teachers more fully with future field trips.

An appropriate picture:

After these somewhat complex conversations the whole group decides on a 'first development project' to deal with. The group chooses a strength which is preferably agreed upon by all stakeholder groups and is supported by as many participants as possible. Important qualities of the central strength are identified. The goal is to then extend the strength by working towards fulfilling highly chosen wishes. 'Next steps' are identified and goals are negotiated during the following months.

(Do I have the correct meaning here?)

(See detailed descriptions in the practical modular system, chapter 5 “goals and development project”).

6. Betsavta: Preparation for the negotiation process.

IS THIS BEFORE OR DURING THE STRENGTHS AND WISHES WORKSHOPS OR FIRST NEGOTIATION ROUND OR WHEN?

Learning truly democratic behaviours often involves big challenges, especially because participants have very different roles both in and out of the school context and are often entangled in hierarchical power structures. It is necessary to thoroughly understand the principles which underpin a truly democratic process, so that all interests and needs can be adequately represented. An excellent way to learn these principles is by participating in dynamic exercises, originating in Israel, known as Betsavta. In early group sessions participants are guided through some of these exercises, and as a result go into the negotiation rounds with some idea of what democracy really means, and a deeper understanding of their own abilities and limitations in acting democratically

During the course of these highly effective Betzavta exercises, democratic ways of functioning are demonstrated and tested and participants come to understand common rules and procedures with regard to working and living democratically.

A description of Betzavta/Togetherness Exercises from Maroshek- Klarmann/Henschel/Oswald/Ulrich 1997

Betzavta is an educational concept in the field of democratic development, originally developed by the “Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace” in Jerusalem, Israel. The concept was later adapted for German educational programs with the intent to provide lively experiences of democracy and democratic principles for children, teenagers and adults. In contrast to traditional methods of political education such as lectures discussions and debates, these exercises enable participants to actually experience and reflect on democratic principles. Participants learn that true democracy is not a description of certain forms of government, but can be translated into a behaviour in everyday situations.

“The founding principle of the ‘Betzavta’ exercises is the acknowledgement of equal rights of freedom for everybody: the ability to live according to one's own needs, values and norms. This naturally creates conflicts with other people. It is the way in which we deal with these conflicts which determines the democratic character of a society. Through participation in the Betzavta exercises, participants learn that democracy is not limited by compromise or majority vote. but rather there is a striving for the highest possible freedom for all.”

The Betsavta exercises provide a simulated situation in which the group has to make decisions and solve problems. This is followed by an evaluation phase which examines the degree of satisfaction with the process. Participants become aware of how and why decisions or actions were made. An analysis is made of the circumstances in which needs were expressed, whether the needs were taken seriously or ignored, whether everybody was able to express their needs, who

imposed his or her will on others and why, alliances which formed, whether responsibility was taken or given away, whether alternative suggestions were heard and considered seriously or ignored, whether implied assumptions were checked, whether conflicts were real or imagined, and so on.

As an example, in one exercise, three volunteers are asked to share one pumpkin between them. In the beginning, each participant usually claims the whole pumpkin. After a while, participants attempt to find a compromise where each person gets an equal piece of the pumpkin. The question arises as to whether all three are satisfied with this solution. A compromise often means that no one gets what they really need or want. For many it is an enlightening realization that everyone can get their needs fully met. In the above example, one person may have only wanted the seeds for future plantings, the second only the flesh to make soup, and the third only the skin to make a Halloween lantern. These needs only become apparent if participants communicate well with each other. (I THINK I WILL LEAVE THIS PARAGRAPH OUT AND JUST LEAVE THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE)

In another exercise, two groups are given two different tasks which appear to interfere with each other and it appears impossible for both groups to achieve their goals. Chaos often ensues, and eventually, as they become aware of their own functioning, participants are often astounded that a much broader range of possible solutions emerges, and solution is reached which meet everyone's needs.

One essential principle of the “Betzavta” concept is the in depth exploration of viewpoints, and of the interests and needs behind them. If viewpoints and “positions” alone are expressed, the discussions often focus on pros and cons, whereas the disclosure of needs generally leads to an understanding of individual motives and opens up a completely new and extended view of the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it.

Participation in these exercises paves the way to effectively address current issues and conflicts within the school. (See practical modular system, chapter 4, “establishment of the negotiation round”)

Both authors speak English and are happy to answer questions. (OK ???) They can be contacted on :